

October 28, 2009

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) today lauded signing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act into law. The law represents the first federal legislation to extend important protections to victims of violent hate crimes committed based on a person's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and/or disability. It also strengthens existing hate crimes protections for a variety of other categories, including race, color, religion, national origin and ethnicity.

In a statement, Rep. Gutierrez said:

"Our constitution does not specify equality for a few or justice just for those we agree with. This law is built on the very basic and fundamental premise this country was founded on: that all men and women are created equal and held as equals under the law. There is never any excuse to tolerate senseless violence in this country, and we will not allow anyone to be targeted based upon the color of their skin, religious belief, national origin, sexual orientation, or their gender identity. I applaud President Obama for signing this needed legislation into law, and I hope it will be only the first of many steps toward a legal system that does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity."

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